

**Fundamental Obligation of the Lodge Master**

**20<sup>th</sup> Degree Essay  
College of the Consistory**

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## **Fundamental Obligation of the Lodge Master**

A fundamental obligation is considered basic or foundational, nothing more; in an architectural context – barely more than footings. The Lodge Master is taken here to be the Master of a regular Masonic Lodge chartered and functioning under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge, in this case the Grand Lodge of Maryland.

The essential or indispensable obligation of a Lodge Master is to perform his duties as Master of the Lodge to the best of his ability and to serve as Master until his successor has been duly elected and installed. This is the Master's obligation taken under oath at his installation. The Master is also required to assent to the charges and regulations of Free and Accepted Masons, prior to taking the oath.

The Master commits himself to provide leadership to his Lodge, all the while adhering to his duties as Master and acting within the authorities granted by the Grand Lodge and under its lawful edicts. For practical purposes, and as demonstrated in practice, the fundamental obligation of the Master is to provide leadership to his Lodge, to the brethren and to his line officers, especially those elected officers.

How is this fundamental obligation fulfilled? Being minimal the fulfillment may be accomplished by providing leadership training to the Senior and Junior Wardens who will be following to the Master's chair in the east. (Some Lodges today have members in these roles that are not intending to proceed further; they are merely "filling in".) The provision of leadership training is essential if the Lodge is to have even minimally qualified senior officers in the future. The leadership training provided by the Master should focus on matters that will be expected of the Wardens, both within and without the Lodge. Training in Masonic rituals and jurisprudence are provided through Grand Lodge schools of instruction.

Aside from meeting the fundamental obligation to future leaders of the Lodge, the Master should be expected to provide a leadership role within the Lodge itself. This obligation would be met in a minimal way by conducting the stated meetings.

If we expand our definition of fundamental to include constructive and harmonious leadership we will approach a far more appropriate role for the Master of the Lodge. Constructive and harmonious leadership makes Lodge attendance a rewarding event and encourages active participation by the membership. How might this leadership role be fulfilled by the Lodge Master?

There are two circumstances under which the Master may need to implement his constructive and harmonious leadership: for a Lodge which has no ongoing activities, and for a Lodge which carries on stale, though traditional, activities. For Lodges with no or minimal activities the Master should develop some. For Lodges with stale, traditional activities the Master should implement changes.

Example activities include presentation of programs and events, development of new and challenging ideas, starting new traditions, experimenting with new fundraising projects, and implementing new style Masonic education programs. Instead of visiting the same Lodges in your District, visit a Lodge in an adjacent state. Make every effort to encourage those Brothers who are in line, as well as those who might respond to your encouragement by getting into the line. Suggest new ways to deal with budget matters. For example, would making a loan be preferred to disposing of an asset?

Without harmonious leadership of the Lodge officers, those following in the line will not be successful and the Lodge stands to fail. The brethren are likely to endure without harmony longer than the leaders in line, though they will not be a source for future leaders.

The Master must also exercise self-restraint. He is obliged to keep his passion in bounds and be mindful of his frailties. The master is elected – he is not anointed; he is not a ruler. The Lodge does not belong to the Master. For a Lodge Master to be successful he must not fail to be tolerant, understanding and respectful of the rights of the brethren of Lodge. An excellent example of the importance of this is provided in the Winter, 2009 edition of the Free State Freemason (Vol.32, No.1). Grand Master, M. Worshipful Thomas M. Velvin, Jr. restated (reissued) the guidelines that concern visitation by and with the M. Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge and their subordinate Lodges. The Grand Master's restatement was prompted by recent action taken by the majority of the permanent members present at the Grand lodge of A.F. & A. Masons of Maryland. In brief, visitation by any Lodge or Mason beholden' to the M. Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge will be by Proper Invitation only. A Proper Invitation can only be extended by the Worshipful Master, and must be in writing. Most relevant to our discussion here of a Master's obligation to his Lodge: a Proper Invitation cannot be extended unless and until the visitation has been approved, without exception, by the Lodge membership. This guideline recognizes that members of the Lodge are entitled. The guideline also serves to avoid embarrassment to a Mother Lodge or the Grand Lodge of Maryland.

The Master cannot look to others to do what is right and in the best interests of the Lodge; he must be able to look first to himself. Of the nine great lights of Masonry taught in the 20<sup>th</sup> Degree, justice, toleration and truth are most important to the Master; the other six, veneration, generosity, heroism, honor and patriotism, pale in importance. The obligation on the Master is to submit his sermons to the tests of justice, toleration and truth before taking them to the pulpit.

Harmony is a natural characteristic of the entire created world, except for man's interaction with his kind. Man is not by his nature harmonious within his species. This circumstance may be in part an instinct for survival: first of self and family. Survival of others comes second, and is a learned trait dependant upon mutual benefit. Leadership is necessary for the successful conduct of mutually beneficial activities. Although Masonic activities are mutually beneficial, they are not necessary for survival and thus require a harmonious circumstance for success.

A final obligation on the Master is to teach. Pike states this clearly in his 20<sup>th</sup> Degree lecture. The Master within the Scottish Rite is to teach the Masonic truths and lessons: attain knowledge (4<sup>th</sup> Degree), attend to duty (5<sup>th</sup> Degree), be kind (6<sup>th</sup> Degree), judge responsibly (7<sup>th</sup> Degree), seek truth (8<sup>th</sup> Degree), etc.